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KGB-tainted reporters' messages checked in Moscow against Reuters, says former colleague

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In the second in a series of articles based on exclusive interviews with The Times, Ilya Dzhirkvelov, a former KGB officer and Tass correspondent who defected to Britain last month, explains the intelligence role of Russian journalists abroad and their relation to the KGB.

All Soviet correspondents abroad are agents of the KGB, to a greater or lesser extent. But according to Mr Dzhirkvelov, the information they send back to Moscow is often tailored to suit the Kremlin's view of the world. As a result the Soviet leaders receive and even act upon a distorted picture of world events.

Mr Dzhirkvelov was a full-time KGB officer until 1956, and after a spell with the Union of Journalists in Moscow became a correspondent of Tass, the Soviet news agency, overseas, first in Zanzibar (subsequently part of Tanzania) in the mid-1960s, then in Sudan at the beginning of the 1970s.

But, as he put it in his interview with *The Times*, as a Tass correspondent he "never lost touch" with his former colleagues in the KGB, and worked for Soviet intelligence both in East Africa and subsequently as information officer at the World Health Organization in Geneva, his last posting before his defection.

According to Mr Dzhirkvelov, some correspondents are what he describes as "pure journalists", while others are simply KGB agents who use journalism as a cover. "Pure" journalists send their information to Tass, which distributes it as it thinks fit, while "KGB" journalists have their own channels.

In the final analysis both perform the same function, since both act as an arm of Soviet foreign policy. A Soviet journalist, Mr Dzhirkvelov says, is by definition an agent of political intelligence, whether he works directly for the KGB or not.

While what reaches the Soviet press is tendentious and selective, what reaches the authorities tends to correspond more closely to the true state of affairs. But Mr Dzhirkvelov maintains that the authorities prefer an "interpretation" of events which reinforces their belief in the gradual advance of the Communist—or at least, Soviet—cause throughout the world, and tend to ignore less palatable reports and inconvenient facts.

When he was a correspondent in both Khartum and Zanzibar, Mr Dzhirkvelov tried—according to his own account—to alert the authorities on a number of occasions to the fact that the situation was not as favourable to the Soviet interest as was believed. His instructions in both cases were to form close ties with members of the Government, especially those thought to be sympathetic to Moscow.

"I was obliged", he told *The Times*, "to get to know leading personalities, find out the balance of forces, report back what changes were in the wind and so on. As a journalist I could ask questions a more obvious KGB agent could not"

In Khartum, Mr Dzhirkvelov reveals, he had a meeting every morning at nine o'clock with a regular KGB agent, at which he reported in detail his conversations with Sudanese figures. He also undertook intelligence missions on request.

He was dismayed to discover in 1971 that Moscow took the quite unfounded view that Sudan was ripe for a pro-Soviet coup. Mr Dzhirkvelov's knowledge of the country suggested otherwise, and he claims to have advised the authorities in Moscow and the local Soviet Embassy accordingly.

In the event the Communist coup of July, 1971, was short-lived, the conspirators were rounded up and shot, and the Soviet Ambassador was asked to leave. Mr Dzhirkvelov left Sudan discreetly soon afterwards.

After the Sudan debacle, Mr Dzhirkvelov served for several years as chief foreign editor of Tass in Moscow. He was by now identified with the KGB in the minds of African leaders, and was refused entry to Zambia by President Kaunda in 1975 when appointed by Tass to be their correspondent in Lusaka. In 1977 he was seconded to the World Health Organization in Geneva as information officer.

It is KGB policy, Mr Dzhirkvelov confirms, to infiltrate the United Nations and other international organizations. But he feels too much attention has been paid to highly placed Soviet agents in the United Nations bureaucracy, such as Mr Geliy Dneprovsky, the head of United Nations personnel in Geneva.

Mr Dneprovsky, Mr Dzhirkvelov says is important because of his access to the files of United Nations employees. But all Soviet citizens in Geneva are—like Tass correspondents—agents of the KGB in some sense, and all report back their conversations with Westerners.

"Geneva", Mr Dzhirkvelov says, "is a huge centre of international espionage, the Tangiers of our time".

When he arrived at WHO, Mr Dzhirkvelov was told by his Soviet superior that his work would be judged not by its contribution to the United Nations, but by the amount of information it yielded for the KGB. "The more you report", he was told, "the better your work will be—and the better you will feel".

Geneva is not, on the other hand, a particularly effective espionage centre for the Soviet Union. This is partly because Russians there report what they think the Kremlin wants to hear, including conversations which never took place.

Another reason is the enclosed, hothouse atmosphere in which the Soviet community works. Nepotism is rife, according to Mr Dzhirkvelov, and this creates bad feeling. Also, Soviet agents in Geneva compete with one another to satisfy the KGB, with the aim of feathering their nests in Moscow once their tour of duty in the West is over.

The result, Mr Dzhirkvelov told *The Times*, is even more "disinformation" in the Soviet propaganda and intelligence system.

This is a situation which he feels cannot last, especially as the gap between objective truth and the Soviet version becomes daily more apparent to Soviet people through Western broadcasts in Russian. Ninety-nine per cent of those Russians interested in politics listen to the BBC or Voice of America, as indeed do the Soviet leaders themselves, Mr Dzhirkvelov says.

"More often than not we heard the news from the BBC rather than our own correspondents, and when our people do file we always check what they send against Reuters to see what is really happening."

With the "immense growth" in the influence of the BBC and VOA in recent years, the Soviet authorities have reassessed their propaganda effort. Last year a Central Committee directive in *Pravda* called for a more "persuasive" approach, and less "grey" attempts at "window-dressing" in the Soviet media.

There was, it said, a "propensity toward verbal babbling and propaganda cliches". A committee was formed under the former director of Tass, Leonid Zamyatin, to liven things up.

The machinery remains, however, in Mr Dzhirkvelov's view, clumsy and permeated with "disinformation". There were red faces in both Tass and the KGB, he says, when Mr Robert Mugabe was elected Prime Minister of a democratic Zimbabwe, an event which Moscow had insisted the "British imperialists" would never allow.

"Old Africa hands" such as Mr Dzhirkvelov had argued differently, but were ignored.

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Photograph by Harry Korg

Somewhere in London: Mr Ilya Dzhirkvelov, a former KGB officer and Tass correspondent, who defected to Britain last month, seen telling *The Times* of his experiences.

He said that all Soviet correspondents abroad were to some extent also agents of the KGB. Their reports reaching the Soviet press were tendentious and selective, while those to the authorities tended to correspond more closely to reality. The authorities, nevertheless, preferred an "interpretation" of events that reinforced their belief in the advance of Communism.

At his post in Khartum, he had a meeting every morning with the regular KGB agent to whom he reported his conversations with Sudanese figures. He was dismayed to find in 1971 that Moscow took the unfounded view that Sudan was ripe for a pro-Soviet coup.

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STAT

Afghan Invasion Puzzles Defector

From Reuters

LONDON--A former Soviet intelligence officer who defected to Britain said in an interview published Tuesday that many middle-ranking Soviet officials could not understand Moscow's military intervention in Afghanistan.

Ilya G. Dzhirkvelov, a former KGB officer and one-time Tass news agency correspondent, told the Times of London, "We simply could not understand why the leadership (in the Kremlin) had felt it necessary to take such a senseless and irrational step."

"We thought it was complete madness," said Dzhirkvelov, whose last job was as a press officer on the staff of the World Health Organization in Geneva.

The newspaper, which did not indicate how it obtained the front-page interview, said Dzhirkvelov reported that many Soviet officials of his age and rank were relieved at the U.S. call to boycott the Moscow Olympics, because it might force the Kremlin to reconsider its policies.